

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman Fortenberry, along with seven other leading Members of Congress, today called on the President to urge the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to conduct special comprehensive nuclear inspections in Syria. Concern stems from Syria's clandestine construction of an alleged nuclear reactor intended to produce weapons-usable plutonium near the town of Al-Kibar. According to news reports, this facility, which was likely built with North Korean assistance, was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September 2007.

"Syria is obligated by international law to engage in nuclear activities that are completely open and transparent," Fortenberry said. "Given the strong evidence suggesting Syria's covert attempts to build a nuclear reactor that could further a nuclear weapons program, Syria should immediately allow international inspectors unfettered access to its nuclear program, and allay concerns that it may still be engaging in undeclared nuclear activities."

Fortenberry's letter to the President comes as the nations that comprise the IAEA's governing board meet this week in Vienna, Austria. Signatories to the letter include Congressman Edward Markey (D-MA), Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Congressman Ed Royce (R-CA), Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA), Senator John Ensign (R-NV), and Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (ID-CT).

High-ranking IAEA officials share international concerns that Syria may be concealing nuclear materials and equipment that could be used to obtain nuclear weapons capability. Under international treaties and agreements, Syria is required to declare nuclear activities so that the IAEA can ensure that these activities are used for exclusively peaceful purposes.

The Fortenberry letter also urges the President to use existing legal authorities to impose sanctions on Syrian individuals and entities that received illicit North Korean assistance. The letter notes that the President used these same authorities in August 2010 to sanction North Korean individuals and entities that provided illicit assistance to Syria's weapons of mass destruction program.

Fortenberry, who co-chairs the Congressional Nuclear Security Caucus, is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Oversight and Government Reform National Security Subcommittee.

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